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ABSTRACT

To develop a historical perspective on the sources of the controversy over the appropriate place of oral reading in formal reading instruction, this paper presents a brief history of oral reading instruction as used in American schools from 1880 to the present. The paper describes in detail both classroom and clinical practices that rely on oral reading as an instructional component, identifies major shifts in practice and the factors influencing those shifts, and discusses research dealing with the effects of oral reading instruction. Based on the historical review, the paper suggests that (1) certain forms of guided oral reading practice can contribute significantly to growth in student reading ability; (2) effective practice in oral reading includes such elements as the use of text that is rich in language, the modeling of appropriate oral reading by the teacher, the opportunity for student rehearsal, the opportunity for students to perform in both individual and audience contexts, and high standards for student performance before moving to a new text; and (3) the dominant use of "round robin" oral reading is due in part to the teacher's desire to evaluate students' word identification skills and in part to the need to create a reading task for which students easily can be held accountable. (FL)

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Oral Reading Instruction: A Century of Controversy (1880-1980)

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Abstract

This review offers a brief history of oral reading instruction in American Schools from 1880 to the present. The purpose of the review is to develop an historical perspective on the source(s) of controversy with respect to the appropriate place of oral reading in instruction. Both classroom and clinical practices which rely on oral reading as an instructional component are described in detail. Major shifts in practice and the factors influencing these shifts are identified. Research studies of the effects of oral reading instruction are reviewed. The authors draw a set of conclusions regarding the current state of affairs in oral reading instruction. This is followed by a set of recommendations for future research in the area.

Oral Reading Instruction: A Century
of Controversy (1880-1980)

There is perhaps no other single activity which has maintained as continuous a role in reading instruction as teacher guided oral reading. Jeanne Chall (1967) has described oral reading as one of the eight "expectables" in the teaching of reading in American schools. The formats for oral reading have changed from time to time, as have concerns for its use, overuse, and abuse. Today, teacher guided oral reading stands as a common and integral part of instruction in regular primary classrooms and clinical/remedial programs (Howlett & Weintraub, 1980). This, despite the fact traditional practices in oral reading instruction are routinely indicated in methods texts (e.g, Durkin, 1978) and in the professional literature (e.g., Allington, 1982). And yet it seems certain that oral reading must serve a very real function in instruction or it would have disappeared long ago. That function appears to be rooted deeply in tradition and the belief systems or "craft knowledge" that teachers have developed toward the value of oral reading - a value which is not universally shared by teacher educators (Taylor, Pickert and Chase, 1980).

Why is there this apparent disparity between popular theory and popular practice? What are the functions (real and imagined) for oral reading as it is currently used in beginning instruction? How might the discrepancy between theory and practice in oral reading be resolved?

The search for answers to these questions demands both scrutiny of the history of American reading instruction and consideration of research on the characteristics and effects of oral reading. A thorough review of these literatures has led us to some insights and speculations regarding the status of oral reading in instruction. Our purpose in writing this review is to synthesize information from a variety of sources in a way that might prove useful in guiding future research activity.

The Recitation Lesson and Oral Reading

Throughout the colonial and early post-colonial days, the chief emphasis in reading instruction in American schools was on the recognition of symbols (the ABC's, syllables, and so on). During this early period, only a small amount of attention was given to the skills of reading orally. Beginning around 1800, and continuing until the last decade of the 1800's an increasing emphasis was placed on oral reading in instruction. The method of oral reading used during this time centered on the recitation lesson drawing out of the Pestalozzian movement in Europe. Raub (1883) provides the following general description of how the student was to be prepared for the recitation lesson:

> Before the lesson (recitation) it is a good plan for him (the teacher) to read the lesson aloud (to the students) or at least some of the most difficult parts of it, when he assigns it, calling the attention of the pupils to the new or difficult words, explaining literary allusions, referring the pupils to certain biographical or historical works to enable them to explain such reference as is made to characters in biography or history, so they get the good thought of the author and the aid of the piece. All this will prepare them to study the selection intelligently and with interest.

Newell, in a set of readers published in 1880 offers the following guidelines for the teacher conducting the recitation portion of the lesson:

> ...Ordinarily each pupil will read one paragraph...but occasionally a pupil may be required to read several paragraphs or even the whole lesson...When a paragraph presents some unusual difficulty to a pupil it is usual to require him to read it again and again until the error is corrected. But it sometimes happens that, from want of self control, or from some infirmity of temper, the pupil seems to be unwilling to make the desired correction. Under these conditions, simultaneous reading may produce the desired effect. The pupil may find himself able to do in concert with others what he was unable, or fancied himself unable to do by himself.

Newell went on to state that while reading drills are best managed by concert recitations, this form of practice should not supplant the individual recitation.

There appears to have been very little attention during the period on developing techniques to help the student independently acquire text meaning through silent reading. Hyatt (1943) relates the following anecdotal description of an actual recitation lesson in an elementary school in an Ohio Village in 1897:

> Reading was taught orally. One pupil after another read a paragraph out loud without comment or discussion. If a paragraph were read poorly, someone else was asked to read it. If it did not meet with the teacher's approval, the teacher read it to us...But what we enjoyed most was concert reading. The entire class stood in front of the room and read aloud together. In order to keep together, the length of each pause was determined by counting. A comma required a pause about as long as it took to count one; a semicolon: one, two; a colon: one, two, three; a period: one, two, three, four; and an exclamation point: one, two, three, four.

A variation, however slight, on the recitation method was the story method, elaborated on formally by McMurry (1899) and

incorporated later into many instructional programs (e.g., Coe & Christie's Story Hour Readers, 1913). In the story method, the teacher told a story or recited a rhyme to the students repeatedly until they became familiar with it and in many instances memorized it. This initial step was accompanied or followed by analysis of the story and then finally the recitation of the story itself by the students as a group or individually.

Horace Mann (1891) was an early and vociferous critic of the use of the oral reading recitation lesson. At one point in his career, he attempted to learn:

> ...with some degree of numerical accuracy, how far the reading in our schools is an exercise of the mind in thinking and feeling, and how far is it a barren action of the organs of speech upon the atmosphere.

The information that he secured led him to conclude that:

> ...more than eleven-twelfths of all the children in reading classes do not understand the meaning of the words they read; that they do not master the sense of the reading lessons and that the ideas and feelings intended by the audience to be conveyed to, and excited in the reader's mind, still rest in the author's intention, never having reached the place of their destination.

The Roots of Discontent

Although there had been sporadic indictments of oral reading during the early and mid 1800's (e.g., Horace Mann), it wasn't until the period from 1890 through 1920 that there arose a serious reaction against the exclusive reliance on oral reading methods. Numerous arguments appeared in the professional literature at this time questioning the value of the oral recitation lesson. Almost,

all of the critics of oral reading advocated extensive practice in silent reading as the appropriate alternative. It is difficult to ascertain which of the many arguments against oral reading carried the most weight in bringing about a shift in practice. It appears, though, that there were at least eight factors or areas of concern contributing to the movement away from oral reading toward silent reading.

One force for the movement away from oral reading came from the field of educational philosophy--in particular from the Herbartians. Here, there was a general emphasis on meaning and content in all of education and a movement away from elocution and stress on the mechanics as the goals of reading. The Herbartian doctrine was introduced into America at institutes and normal schools, as well as through books on the methods of teaching. The period from 1892 to 1902 is the time during which the Herbartians were most influential (Reisner, 1930). F. W. Parker, perhaps the most influential educational philosopher in America during this period and a supporter of the Herbartian movement, was an outspoken critic of oral reading. "Reading is a mental process," he stated. "Oral reading is expression, and comes under the heading of speech" (1884, p. 388).

A second force for change from oral to silent methods came from leaders in educational psychology. Huey seems to have been crucial in developing arguments against oral reading within this community. Indeed, Horn (1932) points to the year 1908, the year in which Huey's landmark text on reading was first published, as marking the

beginning of the actual shift toward silent reading in classrooms. Huey believed that by stressing silent reading in instruction, children would come to think of reading as the "getting or giving of thought" from what is written rather than simply as the naming of certain words.

A third factor operating toward change was tied to the shifting role of reading in society. Numerous writers began to point out that silent reading--not oral reading--is of importance in "the affairs of adult life" (Gray, 1917). Prior to this period, "reading aloud in the presence of auditors was the first of the fine arts to develop in America's hinterland. It was the chief feature of every social gathering (Minnich, 1936). S. E. Parker (cited in Wheat, 1923) describes this shift in social needs in the following manner:

> The social needs of former days required the teaching of expressive oral reading; the social needs of the present require the teaching of effective silent reading.

The Former Need For Expressive Oral Reading	The Present Need for Effective Rapid Silent Reading
1. Reading material was scarce	1. Reading material is abundant
2. Only a few were able to read	2. Reading is universal; only a few are unable to read
3. Communication was very slow	3. Communication is very rapid
4. Spoken language was the chief means of communication	4. Written language is the chief means of communication

A fourth factor was derived directly from research related to problems in the psychology and physiology of reading. W. S. Gray (1925) cites the findings from laboratory studies (conducted prior to 1910) relating to problems associated with the practice of oral reading (e.g., eye movements and lip movements) as being influential

in the change of practice. Subsequent studies reported by Pintner (1913) and Mead (1915) claiming the superiority of comprehension in silent reading over oral reading offered continuing support for the shift in classroom practice during this period.

A fifth factor was the rapid development of measurement and evaluation techniques during this period. The first silent reading tests which attempted to measure efficiency of reading instruction were devised at about this time (Brown, 1914). In Gray's 1925 review of research in reading, he reported that during 1914 and 1915 two-thirds of the studies reported related to the organization, standardization, and application of reading tests.

> Through their use it became possible to study under classroom conditions the reading habits, achievements and difficulties of larger groups of children. By the close of 1915 scientists, administrators, and teachers were measuring the results of instruction, in reading, comparing achievements in oral and silent reading, determining the factors which made for rapid progress...and measuring the progress of pupils taught by different methods.

Fewer than twenty-five years earlier, William James (1892) had been able to state that "the teacher's success or failure in teaching reading is based, so far as the public estimate is concerned, upon the oral method" (p. 422). Thus, the dramatic shift in the methods and focus for assessing reading ability had a major influence on the movement toward silent reading (Smith, 1965).

A sixth factor was the growing emphasis on content in reading. More and more students were completing the primary grades and continuing in school through the intermediate levels. At the higher levels, the goal of reading to learn replaced that of learning to

read. Both the increased difficulty of the texts and their increased informational load made oral recitation methods seem inadequate for developing independent reading habits and inappropriate for the varying types of materials (C. T. Gray, 1929).

A seventh factor operating during this period of change from oral to silent emphasis was the beginning of a debate over the merits of intensive versus extensive reading. The tradition in the past had been toward intensive reading with students spending a considerable amount of time under teacher direction on relatively short pieces of text. The oral reading recitation method lent itself very well to this goal of intensive practice and mastery. Many writers during this period felt the need for students to be more involved in extensive reading (Buswell & Wheeler, 1923). It was argued that silent reading was much better suited to the goal of wide reading. Oral reading recitations were better suited to large group instruction with a single text. Proponents of extensive reading emphasized the need for individualized instruction with the students free to pursue their own reading interests.

The eighth and final factor to consider, an outcome of several of the others, grew out of the findings from a series of systematic school district evaluation studies, beginning after 1910 (e.g., W. S. Gray, 1917). Directors of these evaluations were often emerging leaders in the field of reading and were also strong supporters of silent reading. They were outspoken in their criticism of the oral reading emphasis they found in schools.

What is The Teacher's Role in a Silent Reading Method?

As the shift to silent reading took hold and gained momentum at the turn of the century, there was considerable speculation as to the appropriate role for the teacher in guiding silent reading. The method that began to evolve was closely tied to the growing popularity of the whole word method and a movement toward controlled vocabulary in readers. This focus on words as the significant unit of instruction and the controlling variable in text development gave the teacher something to focus on in preparing students for the silent reading of contrived text. Level one of the McGuffy readers (1887), one of the first reading series to give serious attention to vocabulary control, offered this prescriptive advice to the teacher:

> In this book, all new words in each lesson are given at the head of the lesson. The pupil should be able to identify these words at sight, and to pronounce them correctly before reading aloud the sentences in which they occur...

The importance of vocabulary introduction and teaching new words before reading was easily carried over to the guiding of silent reading.

The intensive practice notion associated with the oral recitation lesson was abandoned in favor of stress on the efficiency of the first reading as being the important focal point or goal in the reading lesson. The teacher's edition of the New Barnes Readers (1916) offers the following description:

> In our search for new roads to reading, it is strange that we seldom think of the time that would be saved if the pupils were trained to get the thought from a page at the first rapid, silent reading of it. If we can train a pupil so that at first

> reading of a lesson he will do it intensively and grasp the thought expressed by the printed page, it will be unnecessary for him to read it again and again, repeating the text, word for word, until the thought is impressed in his mind.

Whereas in oral reading it had been a relatively easy matter for the teacher to monitor pupil performance and hold students accountable for having completed a lesson successfully, such was not the case with silent reading lessons. The teacher using silent reading needed some means to check on whether the child had successfully recognized the words in the text and apprehended the author's message. This was accomplished through questioning over the content and oral rereading. W. S. Gray (1918) provides the following description of a reading lesson he observed in a St. Louis middle school:

> The lesson was introduced by (the teacher) asking the name of the story. The pupils then read the first paragraph to themselves. The teacher asked the following questions: What is meant by conquest? What is an event? The paragraph was then read aloud. Three errors were corrected. The pupils then read the second paragraph silently. Several other disconnected questions were asked. The pupils read the second paragraph orally, and were severely criticized by the teacher.

It appears that this practice of using oral reading to check on the accuracy of word perception after silent reading was quite popular. It should be noted that this is a far different practice from that of the oral recitation lesson described earlier. The practices for guiding reading described by Gray above were nneither defended nor advocated in the literature. In fact, there were a number of texts published during this time which advocated different methods of guiding silent reading (e.g., Germaine & Germaine, 1922; Watkins, 1922). The recommended methods for primary levels put

forward in books of this type typically consisted of presenting sentences which required action responses on the part of students. There is no evidence that such methods were ever adopted into classroom instruction or commercial materials on a large scale.

When Is The Best Time To Introduce Silent Reading?

In addition to the question of the role of the teacher in guiding silent reading, a second major issue during this period of change was when to introduce silent reading. In reviewing the writings on this question, it is fairly clear that the arguments for increased emphasis on silent reading by the major forces in the field were focused on intermediate rather than primary levels. With very few exceptions, the major writers and researchers of this period defended the use of oral reading in primary grades. Judd (1918) stated that oral reading is the natural form of primary reading. Stone (1922) stated that "The great majority of scientific students of the reading problem regard the oral method as the appropriate and indispensable method in the primary reading lesson." He asserted that the development of smooth, fluent oral reading in the primary grades is an important aid in the development of the proper eye movement habits in silent reading. He believed that vocalization is a natural tendency of the beginning reader and cited Freeman (1916) as evidence for the fact that such sub-vocalization has important connections with the apprehension of meaning.

Buswell (1923) wrote:

> Such an extensive view (i.e., that oral reading should be abolished) is entirely unwarranted. Both oral and silent reading have values, but the two processes are not at all the

> same. It is not the thought of this writer that silent reading should supplant oral reading in the primary grades, but rather it should in an increasing degree supplement oral reading. (p. 3).

Despite such arguments to the contrary, it appears that in practice oral reading was being replaced by silent reading in the primary as well as intermediate grades. McGaughly (1924) reported the following results of a survey related to the uses of silent and oral reading in schools:

1. Overall, oral reading was more prevalent than silent reading;
2. Larger cities, however, had a greater use of silent reading than oral reading;
3. 6/7 of the larger cities used silent reading in the first grades (only 1/2 of the smaller ones reported this).

The Report of the National Committee on Reading (1925) recommended that "pupils should be taught from the beginning to read both orally and silently, and that as a rule, approximately an equal amount of class time should be devoted to each type of reading in the first grade." Hyatt (1943) reported that oral reading was not being emphasized in many schools after 1925.

These data and the available anecdotal descriptions of classroom practices would seem to suggest (a) that silent reading was rapidly displacing oral reading as the principal focus for instruction during this period, and (b) that the form of oral reading instruction in use had changed from the recitation lesson

format to a means of checking on word perception during silent reading.

A Spirited Reaction

Beginning around 1930 and continuing through the next decade there was a discernible movement in the professional literature advocating reinstating oral reading in the primary grades. Much of the commentary was focused on the loss of the art of teaching oral reading, although it is not evident that "the art" was ever common practice in classrooms past. Simpson (1929) stated:

> During the past ten years...the art of oral reading has either been abandoned by the school as unimportant, or else neglected to such an extent that we frequently find the exceedingly wasteful practice of one pupil, say, in a class of twenty, waiting his turn to read aloud, in the meantime 'keeping the place' while his nineteen classmates read (p. 137).

Simpson called for a return to the practice of the teacher offering a good oral model for the pupils to follow. The teacher's purpose in reading aloud was "...to set up an ideal of reading...(showing that)...oral reading should always be the expression of assimilated thought" (p. 138).

Paul (1932) attributed the poor results of programs which appeared to stress oral reading to: (a) inadequate classroom practices, (b) vague, indefinite objectives, (c) little knowledge of workable techniques, (d) unsuitabile material used for oral interpretation, and (e) the lack of interest and preparation on the part of the teachers. She cited the following as significant roles of oral reading:

1. Developing and testing comprehension

2. Gaining control in the use of language
3. Developing literary appreciation
4. Personality development
5. Cultural growth
6. Socialization (group experience)

Paul advocated oral reading both as a means to an end (efficient silent reading) and an end unto itself (expression).

Moore (1932) presented the following almost philosophical retrospective on the silent/oral debate:

> Almost all new movements in human progress display to some extent a destructive tendency. They attempt to establish themselves more rapidly and surely by stressing the defects and weaknesses of current beliefs and practice. Quite commonly it is made to appear that there is something essentially antagonistic between the old and the new. This may be true, but it has frequently happened that things of value have been cast out altogether or unduly neglected which should have been interpreted in the light of new discoveries and presented in better form. Even where the advocates of a new movement have no desire to bring about a complete substitution, there is apt to be extreme emphasis on the new theory or discovery while it is getting a foothold...the field of education furnished many examples of this sort of wasteful confusion. One of the latest is the false antagonism that has grown up in many minds regarding the respective merits of oral and silent reading. (p. 83)

But despite these occasional (and sometimes impassioned) pleas no movement developed to return oral reading to primary programs.

The Basal Consensus

The turmoil of the 1930's led into a quiescent 40's. By the early 1950's a time of consensus in American reading instruction had been reached (Chall, 1967). Basal texts assumed a dominant position in elementary instruction, and basal systems tended to look alike.

Rigorous control over vocabulary in readers had become a finely tuned science with complicated formulae for the rate of introduction and repetition patterns. The teacher's role in guiding reading followed by in large the principles set forward in the Directed Reading Activity described by Betts (1946). Oral reading was relegated in principle within the basal approach to a relatively minor role. In practice, it appears that oral reading remained popular as a means of checking on word perception during silent reading. Horn and Curtis (1949) offer the following description and commentary on this practice:

> Oral reading is frequently taught in a manner detrimental to the development of either the abilities common to oral and silent reading or the abilities peculiar to each. For example, pupils who have made little or no preparation to read to other members of their class who sat with books open, following the reader's progress word by word--often to detect a mispronunciation or other petty mistakes.

When Austin and Morrison (1963) surveyed the prevailing instructional practices in reading across the country, the results indicated that this "round-robin" procedure was the dominant means for guiding oral reading in classrooms across the country through the 50's and 60's. The data from a survey by Artey (1972) suggests similar patterns through the late 60's and early 70's. Thirty-seven percent of the teachers surveyed in his study indicated that the major justification for oral reading instruction was to stress precision in word perception. With respect to the practice of taking turns in a group, teachers (47%) said that it gives all children a chance to practice their word recognition skills.

Teachers (47%) reported that the best way to evaluate the quality of oral reading was to count errors.

A survey of oral reading practices in regular classroom settings reported by Daly and Hoffman (1982) indicates that similar patterns of use and beliefs about oral reading continue to this day. They report that the vast majority of classroom teachers regard oral reading as a valuable part of the instructional program for both the good and the poor reader. The dominant pattern for practice is turn-taking, with the teacher monitoring for accuracy.

Adopting Doyle's (1980) framework for academic learning tasks it is easy to see how the round robin oral reading framework might be well suited to effective management in a typical reading group setting. Accountability for task performance in round robin reading is high, with the teacher in a position to quickly and easily monitor success rates. This is particularly true when teacher goals for such lessons are dominated by word recognition and fluency concerns. Guided silent reading of text as prescribed by most basals presents a somewhat poor alternative from a classroom management perspective. Task ambiguity is high in such situations. It may be that teachers find questioning after silent reading a cumbersome and unreliable means of monitoring task success when the goals they hold relate to word recognition and fluency.

Oral Reading In Clinical and Research Settings

In contrast to the somewhat negative view of oral reading in regular classrooms that has evolved over the past century, the uses of oral reading in clinical and laboratory research settings have

been accepted by a broad spectrum of researchers and practitioners alike. The use of multisensory and language experience based approaches which contain a heavy emphasis on oral reading have been a significant part of instructional programs for disabled readers since the founding of Fernald's remedial clinic in 1921. Over the past fifteen years, efforts to use oral reading in remedial instruction have received increasing attention in the research literature.

Neville (1965) reported the results of an exploratory study of remedial instruction in which significant differences on word recognition and comprehension measures were found for an oral method. The method relied on echoic reading with the teacher reading text aloud and the student emulating the model in turn with his or her own reading. In attempting to explain the efficiency of this sort of instruction, Neville (1968) argued that the association of meaning with printed words is aided by oral response. After repeated practice, the reader related the meaning directly with the printed form. Thus, according to Neville, as the pronunciation of words becomes superfluous, vocalization during silent reading should decrease, and by the process of cue reduction, skill in silent reading would gradually develop. He criticized the look-say approach for its focus on single words and suggested that a focus on larger units which include intonation patterns is more appropriate. In a follow-up to the 1965 study, he found that a group taught through echoic response techniques had a reduction in vocalization over a silent reading group. He also found that the echoic approach

group achieved greater fluency of reading over a simple oral reading group. No differences were found in this second study with respect to word recognition or comprehension between groups.

Heckleman (1968) reported on the use of an oral reading technique termed the Neurological Impress Method (NIM) with disabled readers. This is a system in which there is unison reading between the teacher and the student. The teacher uses his/her finger as a locater. Heckleman reports "outstanding" success with disabled readers in clinical settings using this approach. Cook (1976) investigated the effectiveness of the neurological impress method with remedial reading students and found statistically significant differences on oral and silent reading comprehension tests and a word recognition test in favor of NIM.

Keislar and McNeal (1968) found in their research that an oral method (i.e., speaking the words aloud while learning) was superior to a silent learning program even though the criterion consisted of silent reading. This was an extended replication of an earlier study with similar results.

The method of Assisted Reading (Hoskisson, 1975; and Hoskisson, Sherman, and Smith, 1974) has also been used with success in clinical settings. In this method someone reads phrases or sentences in a story one at a time, and the child repeats each phrase or sentence after the reader. This procedure, similar to the echoic method reported on by Neville (1965, 1968), is continued through an entire story. As an alternative to sentence patterns and

repetition larger chunkcs of text might be the form for instruction such as a story being read and reread a page at a time.

Lovitt and Hanson (1976) reported success with a technique which included continuous oral practice to criterion levels of rate and comprehension on passages. Their treatment involved both skipping and drilling on passages. In some cases where students were making rapid success, they were allowed to skip to higher levels. In cases where there was difficulty, there was intensive rereading (drill) on passages before moving on.

Chomsky (1978) reported "remarkable" success in a clinical setting with a story type method of guided oral reading. The researcher would read passages to students providing a model and then students would attempt to follow the model as they read the passage aloud.

Samuels (1979) reported success with a method called "repeated readings" in which the children were required to read and reread short meaningful passages several times until satisfactory levels of fluency were reached. Then the practice was repeated with a new passage. Samuels provided empirical evidence showing the method resulted in increased speed and in a reduction of word recognition errors not only for the given passages, but also for new passages.

Why Do Oral Methods of This Type Work?

Why oral methods work in this context has been a popular area of speculation. Samuels (1979) interprets the growth in reading ability that takes place under repeated reading conditions in terms of Laberge and Samuel's automaticity theory (1974). The focus on

fluency in repeated readings encourages automatic or rapid assimilation of text, thus reducing the attention demands of text at the decoding level. Because rereadings have made the piece familiar, the student is then free to direct more attention to the meaning of the text.

Schreibner (1980) suggests that the reason programs of these types are so successful is that they help readers discover the appropriate syntactic phrasing in the written signal. It is through the mapping of the prosodic features of language (pitch, stress, and juncture) onto the text that the reader is led to discover its richness.

Martin (1974) argues for a story type oral method in his popular Sounds of Language series on many grounds. One obvious advantage of this method, as evidenced in these materials, is that the text contains rich language and meaning for children since there are no specific vocabulary controls in operation. With this approach, the stories are not only fun and therefore motivating, they have predictable patterns of language which are useful to students in reading them independently.

Many have suggested that oral reading is a natural stage for the beginning reader in moving toward silent reading proficiency (Hoffman, 1980; Chall, 1983). The oral feedback loop is seen as reinforcing to the beginning reader in his/her efforts to decode text. As the oral mechanism becomes superfluous, it disappears on its own. The argument is similar to that proposed by Vygotsky

(1962) on the evolution of inner speech for thought from a purely oral language stage.

Rohrer (1943) has argued that oral methods take advantage of the motor theory of consciousness. Basically, this theory holds that it is impossible to have thinking, and hence learning, unless there is bodily movement. Rohrer asserts that pronunciation is important for the beginner not only because of the link with speech, but because the fullest range of motor expression is a tremendous asset in all childhood learning.

From a sociological perspective, oral reading can be viewed as a social activity which, due to its public nature, has inherent facilitating effects if success is insured (Zajonc, 1965). The social nature of oral reading is also rooted deep in the earliest literary experiences of many children when their parents read to them. Reading for the early reader is regarded as a social and a personal event.

From a language development perspective, it seems that oral methods--with their focus on large units of discourse like a story or rhyme--reflect closely the "whole language" environment in which oral skills are first developed in children. Oddly enough, it was this very same argument that was used to explain the superiority of the "word" method over the ABC and phonic methods in the nineteenth century. However, research over the past two decades in language acquisition has clearly shown that the word is not the significant unit in language development. It is the word embedded and experienced in language use that is crucial. All levels of

language--the phonetic, syntactic, prosodic, semantic, and pragmatic--are acquired simultaneously through the child's interaction with the whole language. Certainly all of these perspectives, and there are likely many more, help explain why oral methods such as those described earlier have been found effective in promoting reading growth.

Conclusions and Recommendations

We have reviewed oral reading instruction in two environments--the classroom and the clinic setting. The former has demonstrated the staying power of oral reading; the latter, the success of several approaches. What conclusions can be drawn? We believe at least three propositions are suggested in the literature reviewed:

First, certain forms of guided oral reading practice have the apparent potential to contribute significantly to growth in reading ability. We are still unclear on exactly why it is that such methods work, nor do we have much in the way of evidence concerning what the effects are or might be in regular classroom settings.

Second, clinical studies would suggest that effective practice in oral reading includes such elements as the following:

1. The use of text which is rich in language in terms of rhythms, patterns, and quality of expression;
2. The modeling of appropriate oral reading by the teacher;
3. The opportunity to rehearse text by students;
4. The opportunity to perform orally in both individual and audience contexts;

5. Sustaining/formative feedback by the teacher to the student's performance;
6. Teacher guided analysis of text - in terms of language usage and author's intended meaning;
7. An emphasis on oral reading which expresses the author's intended meaning.
8. High standards for pupil performance before moving on to new text.

There are likely a number of different effective formats which may stress one or another of these features depending on the specific instructional objective(s) being addressed.

Third, the dominant use of "round-robin" type oral reading in schools today can be attributed at least in part to the teacher's desire to evaluate students' skills in word identification and in part to the teacher's need to create a reading task for which students can be easily held accountable.

Recommendations

We would recommend extensive research into the efficacy of oral reading of the types just described in regular classroom settings. We are not advocating a nostalgic return to the "good old days" of long ago, simply suggesting that oral reading methods that were dropped in the early 1900's only to be rediscovered in clinical settings over the past 15 years are deserving of attention. To indict oral reading for the way in which it is currently practiced is to misdirect attention. These indictments only serve to antagonize and further widen the gap between theory and practice.

We should avoid creating a false antagonism between oral and silent reading. Studies which set out to prove silent practice is better than oral practice (or viceversa) are ill advised and serve only to divert attention from a much larger issue of the desperate need for more practice (i.e., reading from connected text) in all phases of our reading programs. It would appear that both silent and oral practice are valuable. Oral reading lends itself to intensive practice with a great deal of input and direct instruction from the teacher. Silent reading lends itself to extensive reading with a minimum of teacher guidance. Unfortunately, with the basal approach as it is currently used in classrooms, these conditions are hopelessly confused. We now have a stress on intensive teacher involvement in guiding silent reading to the point that a "silent" reading lesson today--during the guided reading portion--is a fractured experience described recently by the six-year-old son of a colleague as "start-stop reading."

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